DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 346 HE 029 012

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TITLE What Colleges Teach Students about Moral Responsibility? Putting the Honor Back in Student Honor Codes.
PUB DATE 3 Feb 96
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Institute on College Student Values (Tallahassee, FL, February 3, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cheating; *Codes of Ethics; *College Instruction; Colleges; College Students; Educational Environment; Ethical Instruction; Fines (Penalties); Higher Education; *Integrity; Moral Development; Punishment; Student Attitudes; Student Responsibility; Student School Relationship; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Honor

ABSTRACT

A consideration of college honor codes examines why academic integrity is one of the most effective vehicles for teaching about moral responsibility, how honor codes are distinguished from codes of conduct, how students reason about academic integrity issues, the role of penalties and punishments, and steps campuses can take. A discussion of the power of honor codes for teaching students about moral responsibility notes that three conditions must be in place: universal agreement that the prohibited conduct is unacceptable by all campus constituencies; effective prevention or deterrence of the prohibited conduct; and reliable and fair measures of enforcement. Honor codes are described as characterized by a signed pledge, obligation not to tolerate and to report offenders, peer judiciary, and unproctored exams. A look at how students reason about academic integrity notes the strong influence of peers' behavior and the importance of understanding the social and cognitive constructs most prevalent at a particular institution. A discussion of penalties and punishments argues that the role of punishment as a deterrent cannot be ignored. A conclusion lists nine steps that campuses can take to enhance academic integrity and argues that efforts to restore honor to codes of conduct must focus on fostering an environment which encourages students and faculty to adopt the values of integrity. (Contains 23 references.) (JB)

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ED 393 346

What Colleges Teach Students About Moral Responsibility?
Putting the Honor Back in Student Honor Codes

Institute on College Student Values
Saturday, February 3, 1996
Florida State University
presented by
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Introduction

Academic integrity/dishonesty is a complex behavior influenced by multiple variables. Research over the years shows that it continues to be a widespread problem on campuses throughout the country. In fact, there are indications that incidents of cheating may be increasing at both the secondary school level and at colleges and universities (Haines, et al., 1986). The literature also suggests that colleges and universities are increasing the attention paid to the issue. The Carnegie Foundation (1990) study, *Campus Life: In Search of Community*, called for a more integrative vision of community. One in which "individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good" (p.7).

McCabe & Trevino (1993) pose the key question, how can an institution create an environment where academic integrity is socially acceptable, where institutional expectations are clearly understood, and where students perceive that their peers are adhering to the policy? They concluded that the existence of an honor code while important, was not as important as other social context factors.

As we explore ways in which we can put "the honor back in honor codes or codes of conduct" we will examine several issues and topics. We will consider why academic integrity is one of the most effective vehicles for teaching about moral responsibility; identify ways in which honor codes are distinguished from codes of conduct; review how students reason about academic integrity issues; consider the important and complicated role of penalties and punishment; review some of the steps campuses can take; and, identify additional resources.

HE 029 312

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In thinking about whether or not an academic honor code is the answer for your campus keep in mind the advice of Derek Bok (1990) "Even if students refuse to have an honor code, it is worth considering whether some equivalent can be found that will do as much to provide serious thought about issues of moral responsibility" (p.87).

Academic integrity - one of the most effective vehicles for teaching students about moral responsibility.

The topic of academic integrity offers one of the best opportunities for academic affairs and student affairs to work together to address a campus issue. Hoekema (1994) noted that academic integrity is one of the best examples of a situation in which a college or university can effectively control behaviors. He notes that the following three conditions must be met for an institution to have a moral basis for the control of conduct.

1. There is universal (or almost) agreement that the prohibited conduct - cheating and plagiarism - is considered unacceptable by all campus constituencies. Academic integrity is considered to be indispensable to the conduct of intellectual inquiry. There is little debate about its prohibition. Academic dishonesty is the most serious violation of trust that can occur in a community of scholars and we expect all members to deplore and resist it.
2. The prohibited conduct can be effectively prevented or deterred.
3. Reliable and fair measures of enforcement are available.

Other aspects of student conduct (alcohol abuse, visitation and security issues, sexual conduct, harassment, etc.) which colleges and universities seek to control seldom meet all three of the conditions.

What are honor codes?

There are several definitions of honor codes. Hein (1982) offers a fairly comprehensive definition. "An honor system properly conceived is the proclamation and

legislation of the intentions of a community of persons united in mutual agreement to oppose those inclinations and strategies that they might otherwise give in to and adopt to further their individual ends" (p. 4). The notion of a *community of persons united in mutual agreement* is a key concept.

(McCabe, 1993) notes that "Honor codes are institutional arrangements that generally reduce the role of faculty in the judicial process for addressing incidents of student cheating" (p. 650). The important point is the increased role that students play in the prevention and adjudication of incidents of academic dishonesty.

Honor codes are usually distinguished by the following characteristics (Melendez, 1985):

- signed honor pledge
- obligation not to tolerate and to report offenders. Melendez found that only 4 out of 30 institutions consider failure to report as an honor code violation.
- peer judiciary
- unproctored exams

Research indicates that there is less reported cheating on campuses with honor codes (May & Loyd, 1993; McCabe & Trevino, 1993) and students report a greater likelihood that they will report violators if institutional regulations require reporting (Nuss, 1984). There are several reasons why this may be true.

- Students pledge to abide by an code that clarifies expectations between inappropriate and appropriate behaviors.
- Responsibility for control shifts from faculty and administrators to students
- Combined faculty and student support more usually (but not always) is associated with honor codes
- Students with honor codes don't want to jeopardize loss of privileges such as unproctored exams.

How students reason about academic integrity?

- Most common reason why students don't cheat is their personal value system (Payne & Nantz, 1994).
- Students have a "continuum of cheating" - some behaviors are considered to be more serious than other forms of cheating (Nuss, 1984 & Johnston, 1991).
- Students care about what faculty members think about cheating incidents but fail to see each other as important partners in the educational process (Jendrek, 1992;Johnston, 1991).
- Students see cheating as a problem for a variety of reasons (if they are caught, as a way to deal with difficult course loads), but not as a fundamental moral problem (Johnston, 1991).
- The metaphors students used to describe cheating included as a game, addiction, easy way out, personal dilemma, theft, or as a team effort (Payne & Nantz, 1994).
- While students profess to support academic integrity, they are able to rationalize or neutralize deviant behavior as a result of "special circumstances" which allow them to cheat and not consider themselves as dishonest (Haines, et al., 1986).

The strong influence of peers' behavior may suggest that academic integrity is not only learned from observing the behavior of peers, but that peer behavior provides a normative support for cheating (McCabe & Trevino, 1993).

Understanding the social and cognitive constructs most prevalent at a particular institution may enable the institution to confront questionable and damaging behaviors (Payne & Nantz, 1994). It is important for administrators and faculty to understand the reasoning used by their students in order to develop the most effective methods for enhancing academic integrity.

Role of penalties and punishment - different views

Research data (McCabe, 1993; Jendrek, 1989; Nuss, 1984) confirm the reluctance of faculty to use the official reporting procedures. When asked about what they would do if they knew someone had cheated many faculty select more than one option. However, faculty at honor code institutions show a greater willingness to use campus procedures.

The appropriate role of punishment in the enforcement of academic integrity standards is an important and complicated consideration in the development of a campus policy (Gehring & Pavela, 1994). It calls for widespread discussion by members of the campus community to reach some consensus about the best approach for the individual campus. Hoekema's (1986) discussion on the theories of punishment - deterrent, rehabilitative, and retributive provide a useful analysis and framework for considering the issues associated with punishment.

The *deterrent* theory of punishment holds that punishment is justified by its effects in discouraging the person punished and others from committing future offenses similar to the one for which the punishment was inflicted. The *rehabilitative* or reformative view of punishment sees the purpose of punishment above all in its beneficial effects on the individual. Criminals should be subjected to the treatment which will most effectively restore his mental health or improve his behavior. The traditional *retributive* defense of punishment, holds that the justification of punishment lies in its exacting retribution for the offense committed. Unlike the others, this view of punishment looks backward, it judges the appropriateness of punishment by the offense that the person has committed, not by the expected effects of the punishment on himself or on society (pp. 127 - 128).

He concludes that the retributive theory gives due weight to individual rights, considers the proportionality between the offense and the penalty (the more serious the offense, the more serious the punishment), and each application of punishment attempts to bring about a fair distribution of the overall burdens of the crime or offense.

The strictest honor codes usually have only one sanction - expulsion - for a violation and also consider failure to report violations as an honor code violation. While this approach may be appropriate for a select type of institutional culture, for other institutions it presents many difficulties. May & Loyd (1993) report that students on a campus that uses only one sanction consider the major disadvantage of the honor code that "it doesn't work". Hein (1982) concluded that an honor system's penalties are appropriate when they follow from the community norms. He noted that the so-called "death penalty" weakens the ties that bind a community together by evicting or excluding the miscreants. The research also demonstrates that faculty and students are less likely to report a violation when the penalty is considered to be draconian (Gehring & Pavela, 1994).

Modified honor codes treat the topic of penalties and punishment differently. Most encourage, but don't require, a student to report violations. Most use what Hoekema refers to as the proportionality test. That is, the more serious the offense, the more serious the penalty applied.

Appropriately developed penalties are also important because one of the most common reasons students give for cheating is that the risk of getting caught is so low and no one ever gets punished for cheating. The role of punishment as a deterrent cannot be ignored.

Gehring & Pavela (1994) emphasize that the simple sanction of a "F" in the course will not deter students who are already in jeopardy of receiving a failing grade. Nor does the imposition of an "F" grade recognize the dishonest behavior associated with the cheating. Gehring & Pavela (1994) discuss the use of an "FX" notation on the transcript to indicate that the failing grade was given as a result of an incident of academic integrity.

Penalties should be both fair and formidable. However, students who fulfill certain conditions such as no further violations, completion of a seminar on academic integrity, or

completion of a probationary period should have the option to petition for the removal of the FX. As with other aspects of campus discipline, students come to us as works in progress and we should be willing to acknowledge that they can learn important lessons from their mistakes.

Steps campuses can take

Kibler, et al, 1988; Graham, et al, 1994; McCabe, 1995; Pavela & McCabe, 1993 and others list steps campuses can take to enhance academic integrity. A few examples include the following suggestions:

1. Develop clear, specific definitions of academic honesty and employ them uniformly in all parts of the institution.

2. Involve students in educating their peers about the importance of academic integrity, as well as in reporting and resolving academic dishonesty allegations. Long-term reduction in cheating is unlikely without a change in the student values/culture. Modified honor codes like that adopted by the University of Maryland provide valuable opportunities for students to assume leadership in developing, executing, and sustaining the effort for enhanced academic integrity.

3. Appeal to students sense of honor and personal integrity. Remember that the major reason why students do not cheat is their personal value system. Our efforts ought to provide encouragement and support for students to act upon their values. Students should sign honor pledge upon admission. Wording for the pledge should be developed by the student honor council.

4. Reduce the temptations for students to engage in academic dishonesty.

5. Encourage teaching styles and examinations that call for active student classroom participation and critical thinking rather than memorization.

6. Impose reasonable, but strict, penalties when academic dishonesty does occur.

7. Eliminate proceduralism in the resolution of cases. Faculty are reluctant to involve themselves. Students are advised of the evidence, allowed to address the hearing panel, permitted to present witnesses, and to question witnesses against them in an informal conversational setting.

8. In teaching ethics courses acknowledge that right and wrong does exist. Instill in students what Sommer (1993) refers to as "moral common sense" which acknowledges the importance of virtue, honesty, courage, generosity, temperance, self-discipline, and civility. The need for strong positive role models has never been more important.

9. Given the increased incidents of cheating in secondary schools, colleges and universities need to incorporate discussions about academic integrity into the programs it offers for high school students. This would include special enrichment programs, Upward Bound, etc.

Resources

Founded in 1992, the Center for Academic Integrity is a coalition of more than seventy colleges and universities. The Center's mission:

The Center for Academic Integrity is a forum to identify, affirm, and promote the values of academic integrity among students. This mission is achieved primarily through the involvement of students, faculty, and administrators from the member institutions who share with peers and colleagues the Center's collective experience, expertise, and creative energy. There is not single path to academic integrity, and the Center respects and values campus differences in traditions, values, and student and faculty characteristics. The next annual conference will be at Duke University in October, 1996. The Center is an excellent resource for videotapes, materials, policies, etc. For more information contact Sally Cole, Executive Director, at the Center at PO Box 7928, Stanford, CA 94309. 415-723-9610.

Conclusion

May & Loyd (1993) conclude with an important observation. "Academic integrity requires a "double prong" commitment. The honor system by itself means little; the key is the adoption of the honor system values by the individual student. Values of academic honesty cannot be imposed but must be adopted" (p. 128). Our efforts to restore honor to honor codes and codes of conduct must focus on fostering an environment which encourages students and faculty to adopt the values of integrity.

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